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## Off the hook

Mehmet Ali Agca, who added nothing to his credibility by proclaiming himself Jesus Christ, certainly knew the three Bulgarians he says helped him try to assassinate Pope John Paul II. Detailed descriptions of houses, characteristics, and mannerisms prove beyond a doubt that the convicted gunman wasn't pointing the finger at strangers. Defectors from the Bulgarian secret service and other East Bloc rat holes also have confirmed the existence of a plot, and the refusal of two accused Bulgarians to attend their trial in Rome says volumes about their guilt or innocence.

But Italian Prosecutor Antonio Marini had no choice but to ask for their acquittal. He did so under a provision in Italian law that, while not clearing them of suspicion, does acknowledge the weakness of the case. As Mr. Marini said, the trial was "crippled" by his inability to question all the witnesses and defendants. Besides the missing Bulgarians, one Turkish defendant is at large and another

died in a Turkish prison last year. Some prosecution witnesses have refused to testify, possibly for reasons of health.

Then there is Agca himself, who changed his testimony, lied, asserted his divinity, and had a grand old time. That he turned out to be an unreliable witness in no way disproves his original account. The court was at great pains to check it out, even as East Bloc operatives were at great pains to spread disinformation. Although some of their lies were exposed, the absence of key players and the studied madness of the star witness combined to shoot down the case.

Tracing this crime through several closed societies was a difficult assignment skillfully performed by Claire Sterling and the *Reader's Digest*, but it is hard to hold a trial when the witness stand is nearly empty. Agca, whoever his accomplices, has been left holding the bag, much to the delight, no doubt, of the congress meeting in Moscow this week.